

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

3 December 1987

DATE

12-11-87

DOC NO

SOV M 87-20126X

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Internal Settlements in Soviet Client States:
What is Moscow Doing? []

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Summary

Over the past several months, the Soviets have shown increasing interest in alternative political arrangements as a way to resolve regional conflicts, including those involving client states fighting insurgencies. The most extensive and explicit proposals have been made on Afghanistan. The Soviets also have urged the Vietnamese to explore options for a political settlement and [] pressed Nicaragua to comply with the Guatemala peace plan. Proposals on Angola are not nearly so well-defined as the others. []

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[] Moscow is concerned that its involvement in regional conflicts is a barrier to improving relations with key regional actors such as China and the Gulf Arabs; the Soviets probably also hope to keep these issues from affecting progress with the US on other fronts. In addition, the Soviets are motivated by practical concerns: none of their clients have been able to defeat the insurgencies, and some may have difficulty staying in power. Nevertheless, neither the Soviets nor their clients seem willing yet to compromise on the fundamental question of who holds effective political control and Moscow appears to be concentrating on the process of political settlements far more than on the substance that could attract insurgent support and produce agreements. []

This memorandum was prepared by [] Office of Soviet Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Regional Policy Division, SOVA []

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A New Dimension of Soviet Policy

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, several of Moscow's Marxist-Leninist clients in the Third World were fighting significant insurgencies, some for as long as a decade. In spite of massive Soviet military assistance and, in Afghanistan, direct intervention by Soviet forces, none of these clients was close to defeating the insurgents. While some Soviet analyses both before and after Gorbachev's accession acknowledged the indigenous roots of the insurgencies, most assessments of the problem focused on "imperialism's" support for the insurgents, accorded little or no legitimacy to the political claims of opposition forces, and did not pay much attention to the question of alternative political arrangements that might address insurgent grievances. Such issues were said to be the internal concerns of the countries involved. [REDACTED]

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Over the past two years, the USSR has made several diplomatic moves and conducted a broad propaganda campaign intended to demonstrate its interest in political settlements to regional conflicts, including those involving its clients. While the Soviet campaign has been devoted mainly to the need to end outside interference in the affairs of their Marxist allies, in recent months Soviet efforts have widened to include the issue of internal political settlements in several of these states:

- o On a general level, Soviet leadership statements, diplomatic proposals, and academic writings have called for the political settlement of Third World conflicts, including internal disputes, through dialogue and national reconciliation.
- o In Afghanistan and Cambodia, the USSR has supported national reconciliation programs involving government offers of power-sharing with some opposition forces, promises of elections, and other moves toward an ostensibly more open political system.
- o In Central America, the Soviets have associated themselves with the Guatemalan Accord, which calls for democratization and national reconciliation in Nicaragua and other Central American states.
- o The Soviets have begun floating ideas on possible political arrangements in southern Africa.

For public consumption, at least, the Soviets have moved beyond their previous position that all that would be needed to end the insurgencies would be a halt to outside support for the rebels and acknowledged that internal settlements are a legitimate object of international discussion. [REDACTED]

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Tactical Motives

We believe that a series of factors lies behind the Soviets' willingness to address the problem of internal settlements. Some of these factors involve primarily tactical considerations, where real progress toward meaningful settlements is less important to the USSR than are the benefits that the appearance of progress could yield in other areas:

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Cultivating Key Regional Players. [redacted] Soviet academic writings suggests that under Gorbachev the Soviets have become increasingly sensitive to the political barriers that their involvement in regional conflicts have imposed on other foreign policy objectives, including an improvement of relations with China, cultivation of important political and economic actors such as Thailand, the other ASEAN states, and the Gulf Arabs, and expansion of Soviet influence with the Non-aligned Movement. Moscow probably sees support for a political resolution of Third World conflicts as a way to demonstrate its reasonableness, alleviate Third World concerns about the expansionist intentions of the USSR and its allies, and open the door for better relations with these important regional countries. [redacted]

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East-West Considerations. The Soviet are probably counting on their advocacy of internal settlements to help keep regional disputes from complicating discussions with the United States on key issues. [redacted]

[redacted] Moscow continues to reject any formal linkage between regional conflicts and progress on arms control and other issues on the US-Soviet agenda, and Moscow probably calculates that the appearance of flexibility on internal settlements could make it more difficult for the US to link Soviet support of Third World clients with ratification of arms control agreements. Also, the Soviets may hope to influence the debates in Western countries over providing assistance to insurgents fighting Marxist-Leninist regimes. [redacted]

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Dividing the Opposition. The Soviets almost certainly calculate that offers of a political settlement will divide insurgent ranks, lead some opposition leaders and fighters to give up armed struggle, and ease military pressure against the Marxist-Leninist governments. We believe that this was a central objective of their national reconciliation campaign in Afghanistan. [redacted] NF)

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Ensuring a Soviet Role. The Soviets almost certainly see their activism on the settlement of regional conflicts as a way to guarantee an ongoing Soviet political role in a particular area, preventing the West from excluding the USSR from whatever resolution process may emerge. The Soviets have claimed on several occasions that the US has attempted to exclude them from regional settlements in southern Africa and the Middle East. [redacted]

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Practical Considerations

There are other factors that may eventually push the Soviets past tactical maneuvering in the direction of more permanent political settlements to some of the conflicts in which they and their clients are involved:

Intractable Military Situations. In spite of the massive military aid the USSR has given its Third World allies, none have been able to defeat the insurgents militarily and [redacted]

[redacted] Moscow has become increasingly concerned over the costs of its support for its clients, notably Afghanistan and Cambodia. The Soviets may believe that exploration of the possibilities for a political settlement is a worthwhile policy option, if only to see what alternatives might be available to the open-ended, high-cost pursuit of military victory over the insurgencies. [redacted]

Client Political Weakness. A wide variety of Soviet academic and political writing has described openly the failure of "states of socialist orientation" to consolidate political control. While some Soviet academicians still blame this on "outside interference," a large number now focus on the mistakes of the client regimes in moving too quickly to set up Marxist-Leninist institutions in countries where the strength of religious, ethnic, national, tribal, and nascent capitalist forces is far greater than that of socialism. According to these Soviet analysts, the result has been military conflict, economic stagnation, and ever-mounting requirements for Soviet bloc assistance. Indeed, some Soviet observers have questioned the long-term prospects of these regimes for staying in power. A wide variety of Soviet leadership statements suggests that Moscow has decided that in order to reduce the pressure on themselves, these regimes should welcome into the government a variety of traditional and "bourgeois" political forces. [redacted]

The Current State of Play

The most extensive and explicit proposals on an internal settlement have come on Afghanistan. In January 1987, the Kabul regime called for "national reconciliation" and offered a vague scheme for sharing power with opposition forces that was linked to acceptance of a cease-fire by the insurgents. During the summer, the government expanded its initiative to include several more specific provisions, including:

- o A coalition government in which a number of top political and diplomatic posts would be reserved for opponents of the current regime.
- o A multiparty system.
- o A new draft constitution.

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- o Permitting insurgent commanders who agree to join the national reconciliation process to establish autonomous "political and military structures" in the areas they control.

[redacted] the Soviets have been the driving force behind the Afghan proposals, putting them forward over the opposition of many leaders and members of the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). [redacted]

The government of Cambodia offered its own version of a national reconciliation plan this summer, which called for:

- o A dialogue with all opposition elements except former Premier Pol Pot and several unspecified close associates.
- o The withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia simultaneously with the cessation of outside interference.
- o Internationally supervised elections.
- o A coalition government that would include the three resistance factions and a senior government post for Prince Sihanouk.
- o An international peace conference.

Over the past year, the Soviets have been urging Vietnam to explore the options for a political settlement to the Cambodian conflict, both to reduce their own economic burden and to help Vietnam break its economic and diplomatic isolation, and we believe that Vietnam has been the prime mover behind the Cambodian proposals. For its part, the USSR has provided extensive propaganda and diplomatic support for the Cambodian plan. We have no indication, however, that Moscow has pressed Vietnam to meet directly with the resistance, withdraw before a settlement is achieved, or take any other steps Hanoi might see as contrary to its interests. Nor is there any evidence the Soviets are prepared to use their main source of leverage--military and economic aid--to force Hanoi to be more accomodating. [redacted]

The USSR is not a participant in the Central American peace process, but Moscow appears to have concluded that Nicaraguan adherence to the Guatemalan Accord--which has some limited provisions for internal democratization and dialogue with the opposition--is Managua's best option for undercutting the anti-Sandinista insurgents. Here, too, the Soviets have supported the agreements both rhetorically and diplomatically. [redacted] they have urged the Sandinistas to comply with the Guatemala plan. Indeed, during President Ortega's recent visit to Moscow the Soviets almost certainly encouraged the Sandinistas to take additional steps to appear to be complying with the accord. [redacted]

[REDACTED]

Soviet proposals on southern Africa have lagged well behind what they have offered for other regions. Over the past few months, Soviet Africa specialists have suggested some steps that would facilitate a settlement in Angola. They have referred, in general terms, to the desirability of a political settlement in Angola and raised the possibility that, as part of an overall agreement, UNITA representatives--excluding movement leader Jonas Savimbi--might be integrated into the existing political, party, and military structure.

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The Rubicon Yet Uncrossed

Soviet rhetoric on their interest in political settlements to conflicts involving their clients is running well ahead of any substantive change in their positions. The proposals for internal settlements presently on the table suggest that Moscow and its clients are not yet willing to compromise on the fundamental question of who has effective political control:

- o In the last few weeks the Soviets have permitted the PDPA to claim the presidency of an Afghan coalition government, a position that would ensure PDPA dominance of Afghanistan.
- o Phnom Penh has not yet fleshed out its proposals, but Hanoi clearly seeks to retain strong influence over any post-settlement government and wants to retain the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) regime. Moscow has said that any settlement must reflect "existing realities," an apparent reference to PRK predominance.
- o The Guatemalan agreement does not require Managua to discuss political issues with the anti-Sandinista insurgents.
- o The limited Soviet statements on a settlement in Angola offer only the incorporation of UNITA into the existing power structure. [REDACTED]

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We believe that the primary explanation for this gap between Moscow's rhetoric and its limited substantive movement is that its tactical objectives--pursuit of improved ties with important regional actors, structuring the East-West agenda, and dividing the insurgents and their supporters--currently outweigh the military and political concerns that might lead it to make substantive concessions. As a result, the Soviets appear to have concentrated on the process of political settlements far more than on the substance that could attract insurgent support and produce agreements. This is especially evident on Nicaragua, where Soviet exposure is low, and on Angola, where the political viability of the MPLA remains solid. [REDACTED]

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[redacted]

Ideally, of course, the Soviets would like to use the settlement processes to obtain politically what they and their allies have not been able to get through military means--an end to the insurgencies with Marxist-Leninist parties still in effective control. The Soviet campaign on regional conflicts in general and internal settlements in particular enables the Soviets to probe whether favorable arrangements of this kind are available from the insurgents and their regional and Western backers. [redacted]

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In the Afghan and Cambodian cases, both the political and economic costs of Soviet involvement and the potential payoffs of a settlement in relations with other states--especially China on Cambodia--may be high enough that the USSR might be willing to consider compromises on internal political arrangements in order to end the wars. Their ability to make such compromises is constrained, however, by other factors:

- o In Cambodia, Vietnam takes a stubbornly independent line in pursuing its interests, and this independence limits Moscow's ability to influence events there. It is unlikely that Moscow would jeopardize its important access to Cam Ranh Bay by applying significant pressure to Hanoi over Cambodia.
- o The Soviets also have to gauge the negative effect that political compromise could have on the viability of the Marxist-Leninist parties themselves. Moscow has already seen its proposals on Afghanistan increase the chronic factionalism and lower the morale of the PDPA, and we believe it unlikely that the Soviets would proceed with a settlement that destroyed their main lever of political influence and control.
- o In addition, the "loss" of Afghanistan would be a major risk to Gorbachev, who has already spent considerable political capital attempting to push his domestic program past conservative opponents and who is now apparently in a period of political retrenchment. [redacted]

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Outlook

We expect the Soviets, for international consumption, to continue their campaign for political settlements to regional conflicts and to play up their clients' flexibility on domestic political arrangements. Meaningful change in Moscow's positions and in its willingness to press its allies to shift their stances, however, is likely to emerge only slowly, if at all. Key variables affecting Moscow's calculations will include its evaluations of:

- o The prospects that a client will be able to survive the insurgent challenge and the level of Soviet assistance that it will need.
- o The ability of the ruling party to withstand the pressures of sharing power and retreating from total control.

- o The impact of power-sharing on the relative balance of Soviet and Western influence in a particular country and on the overall orientation of that country.
- o The political risks of continued support for the client state to other Soviet international objectives, especially the pursuit of improved relations with China. [REDACTED]

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The interplay of these factors is complex, especially in the Afghan and Cambodian cases, and the USSR is likely to confront some difficult choices in deciding on its next moves in the settlement process. As a result, the Soviets and their allies are likely to pursue a patient, yet opportunistic strategy, making incremental concessions on power-sharing where needed to sustain the settlement process. At the same time, Moscow will continue to use its proposals to probe for divisions in the insurgent ranks and for gaps between the insurgents and their outside supporters that could be exploited to break the back of the insurgencies. [REDACTED]

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SUBJECT: Internal Settlements in Soviet Client States:
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